

TOXIC CHEMICALS: The Cost to Our Health

There is growing agreement across the political spectrum that the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) does not do enough to protect Americans from toxic chemicals. Much has changed since 1976: chemicals have become more pervasive in daily life and scientists have developed a better understanding of how toxic chemicals are connected to some of our country's most serious health problems, including childhood cancers, asthma, impaired fertility, birth defects, and learning disabilities. Now, Congress has the opportunity to overhaul this outdated law and put common sense limits on toxic chemicals. Stronger chemical laws will mean better health for all Americans.

Chronic disease is on the rise

- Leukemia, brain cancer, and other childhood cancers have increased by more than 20% since 1975.¹
- Breast cancer went up by 40% between 1973 and 1998.² While breast cancer rates have declined since 2003, a woman's lifetime risk of breast cancer is now 1 in 8, up from 1 in 10 in 1973.³
- Asthma prevalence approximately doubled between 1980 and 1995 and has stayed at the elevated rate.^{4,5}
- Difficulty in conceiving and maintaining a pregnancy affected 40% more women in 2002 than in 1982. The incidence of reported difficulty has almost doubled in younger women ages 18–25.^{6,7}
- The birth defect resulting in undescended testes has increased 200% between 1970 and 1993.⁸
- Since the early 1990s, reported cases of autism spectrum disorder have increased tenfold.⁹

Chronic disease is linked to chemical exposure

- The last 30 years of environmental health science shows that small amounts of chemicals can have long-term effects when the exposure comes at vulnerable times of development. New studies have linked early life exposure to chemicals and the later diagnosis of breast and testicular cancer, learning and developmental disabilities, and Alzheimer's disease.
- Scientists have linked chemicals in building products, plastics, personal care products, and household cleaners to impairment to the reproductive system, increased risk of certain types of cancer, asthma, and developmental disabilities.
- Over the past decade, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published data showing that exposures to chemicals like phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA), perfluorinated

compounds, and cadmium are common. The CDC reports that almost everyone has these chemicals in their bodies.

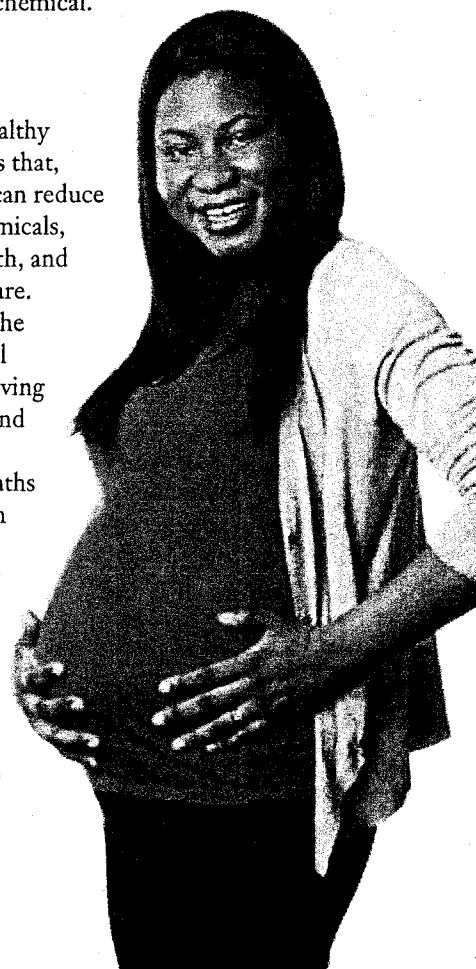
Federal policy regulating chemicals is ineffective

- In the 34 years since TSCA was enacted, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been able to require testing on just 200 of the more than 80,000 chemicals produced and used in the U.S., and just five chemicals have been regulated under this law.
- All 62,000 chemicals formulated prior to 1976 were grandfathered in for use with no requirement that they be tested or shown to be safe.
- The EPA tried to use TSCA to restrict asbestos 20 years ago and failed. Since then, EPA hasn't tried again to use TSCA to ban any dangerous chemical.

Economic benefits of reforming TSCA

The Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition believes that, by reforming TSCA, we can reduce our exposure to toxic chemicals, improve our nation's health, and lower the cost of health care.

- 133 million people in the U.S.—almost half of all Americans—are now living with chronic diseases and conditions, which now account for 70% of deaths and 75% of U.S. health care costs.
- **Even if chemical policy reform leads to reductions in toxic chemical exposures that translate into just a 0.1% reduction in of health care costs, it would save the U.S. health care system an estimated \$5 billion every year.**





By reforming TSCA, we can reduce our exposure to toxic chemicals, reduce our nation's chronic disease burden, and help control health care costs. In simplest terms, real reform will lead to concrete results, like more healthy babies, fewer women with breast cancer, and lower numbers of people with Alzheimer's disease. This is the promise of TSCA reform.

What real reform will look like

To be effective, TSCA reform should:

- **Take immediate action on the most dangerous chemicals.** Toxic chemicals that build up in our bodies and threaten our health should be phased out of commerce. Green chemistry research should be expanded, and safer chemicals favored over those with known health hazards.
- **Require manufacturers to provide basic information to help identify chemicals of concern.** Chemical manufacturers should be responsible for the safety of their products and provide full information on health and environmental hazards. The public, workers, and businesses should have access to information about the safety of chemicals.
- **Use the best science to protect all people and vulnerable groups.** Chemicals should be safe for all people, including children, pregnant women, and workers. The extra burden of toxic chemical exposure on people of color, low-income, and indigenous communities must be reduced and more studies must be done to detect which chemicals are present in our bodies.

The Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition is made up of more than 150 diverse groups united by their common concern about toxic chemicals in our homes, places of work, and products we use every day. www.saferchemicals.org

For the full report and scientific citations, go to <http://healthreportpdf.saferchemicals.org>.

Endnotes

- 1 *America's Children and the Environment*, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2008.
- 2 Holly L. Howe, et al., "Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer (1973 through 1998), Featuring Cancers with Recent Increasing Trends," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, 93, no. 11 (June 2001): 824-42.
- 3 Janet Gray, ed, *State of the Evidence: The Connection Between Breast Cancer and the Environment*, (San Francisco: Breast Cancer Fund, 2008).
- 4 Tracey J. Woodruff, et al., "Trends in Environmentally Related Childhood Illnesses," *Pediatrics*, 113, no. 4 (April 2004): 1133-1140.
- 5 Jeanne E. Moorman, et al., "National Surveillance for Asthma, United States 1980-2004," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5608a1.htm (November 1, 2009).
- 6 a. Anjani Chandra and Elizabeth Hervey Stephen, "Impaired Fecundity in the United States: 1982-1995," *Family Planning Perspectives*, 30, no. 1, (1998): 34-42.
b. Anjani Chandra, et al., "Fertility, Family Planning and Reproductive Health of US Women: Data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth," *Vital and Health Statistics*, 23, no. 25 (2005).
- 7 Kate Brett, "Fecundity in 2002 National Survey of Family Growth Women 15-24 Years of Age" (personal communication), Hyattsville, MD, National Center for Health Statistics (2008).
- 8 Leonard J. Paulozzi, "International Trends in Rates of Hypospadias and Cryptorchidism," *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 107, no. 4, (1999): 297-302.
- 9 National Institute of Mental Health, "NIMH's Response to New Autism Prevalence Estimate," www.nimh.nih.gov/about/director/updates/2009/nimhs-response-to-new-autism-prevalence-estimate.shtml (November 4, 2009).
- 10 National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, *The Power of Prevention: Chronic Disease...the Public Health Challenge of the 21st Century*, (Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

The Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families coalition includes nurses, parents, advocates for the learning disabled, scientists, environmental health advocates, and concerned citizens from across the nation. These diverse groups are united by their common concern about toxic chemicals in our homes, places of work, and products we use every day.

www.SaferChemicals.org